



A June 2015 note from Joan Shirley, as one victim to another
and as the Victim Advocate for the Resource Center for Victims of
Violent Death

Are you a grieving sibling or do you have children, grandchildren or nephews or nieces, friends of any age who are grieving the loss of a sibling? If so, this newsletter is especially for you!

Surviving siblings of any age are often ignored and often referred to as the “forgotten mourners.” While parents usually receive most of the support of relatives and friends, siblings generally receive less. Sometimes adults assume that a child “will get over it easier than adults” because they are young and won’t remember; they will be out and playing in no time... Of course, our work here at the Resource Center tells us that siblings of all ages need the same types of care and support as their parents.

When a child is taken in violent death, who do you normally see on a television newscast? Think about it, isn’t it almost always just the parents unless the person was an adult and their parents are no longer living. Most newspaper articles focus on the same; people identify with the loss of a child being the worst thing that can happen to a parent, but what about those surviving siblings whose lives are no less affected than their parents’? Their lives are just as irrevocably changed; however, they also have different needs from their parents and others.

Small children sense that something is wrong and wonder where their brother or sister has gone; they cannot fully understand that their sibling was murdered nor may they understand death; if as adults we can’t understand why, how can we expect our kids to understand? Their place within the family has now changed, they don’t understand why their parents are crying all of the time and they want more attention and need reassurance that they are still important. They expect that the parents that they know and love will still treat them the same way and life will still be the same. They will pick up on the emotional upheaval in the family and may be angry, cry, lose their appetite and have anxiety attacks. They may ask alarming questions like “When will Jimmy come back and play with me again?”

Older children may realize for the first time that death is real. They may prod the adults in their family for details of what happened only to have those adults feeling unwilling to disclose those details. Children of any age may experience survivor’s guilt; “Why am I still alive and he is dead?” They may believe that death is a punishment and become afraid that if they do something “bad” that they will die. They may feel some shame regarding the death of their sibling especially when asked “How many brother and sisters do you have?” They may feel a strong need to support and comfort their parents; not crying or being perfect in every

way so as not to upset their parents. They may feel guilty if they had had a fight with their sibling right before their death. Some children may try to become the adult in the family if they feel that their grieving parents are seemingly unable to function and care for other siblings. Lastly, they may completely ignore the pain that they are feeling and put on an air of being “just fine and in no need of help”.

Preteens and teenagers live in an intense world of self-discovery and are primarily concerned with life, identity and status and peer pressure; tightly bonded with their peers and beginning to disengage with their family. Their school work may reflect the stress and trauma that accompanies sudden and violent death. With any age child, it is important for their school and teachers be notified of a death within their family. This age of child is basically insecure, they do not accept peers without question and they don't like to be considered “different” in any way. Being a bereaved sibling is very difficult when you spend most of your time trying to fit in; most teenagers do not have to deal with death. They may start self-destructive behaviors such as; picking fights, dangerous behavior, and alcohol or drug abuse as a means of saying “I'm not afraid of death” and “I am overwhelmed emotionally and I can't find relief. They may have intense revenge fantasies and helping teens find appropriate ways to express anger or rage is very important. Often teens do not participate in family therapy or support groups but may depend on their friends and adults outside of their family for support and understanding. It is not unusual for a single parent to start depending on an older sibling for emotional support and often, they have to become adults long before their time. Many feel that they have lost their family as mothers retreat into their own grief, depressed and sick for years. Fathers may retreat into work and be too overwhelmed to have time for the remaining surviving children.

Adult sibling survivors often grieve alone, unable to speak to their older parents about their sadness for fear of upsetting them and many times, an older sibling's death is not as surprising to society as the loss of a child. It can be difficult for adults especially if that sibling was married in that once again, the surviving spouse and children get most of sympathy; somehow minimizing the sibling's own loss. There appears to be less research on adult surviving siblings and so there is not much information to be found in written materials on adult sibling grief. Sometimes there can be feelings of guilt, abandonment, and loss of innocence, fallout from the family, fears, anxiety and an inability to sleep. If the loss of a sibling leaves one as the only surviving child in a family, often siblings feel the burden of providing all of the family's future; “I have to have children, I have to be the successful child, I am the only one left to care for my parents and I must be the perfect person.” Often families breakdown or apart after a death of sibling as

February 2015

ATTENTION **

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Notes:
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Feb 14 Valentine's Day

							Feb 16 Presidents' Day
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Feb 10 2 nd Tuesday afternoon support group McDonalds Juan Tabo and Lomas 1-3pm
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	Feb 18 3 rd Wednesday evening support group McDonalds JuanTabo and Lomas ABQ 6-8
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Feb 25 Los Lunas evening support group MCDONALDS 652 Main St. Los Lunas 6-8pm
							Feb 26 Last Thursday evening support group MCDONALDS 901 Unser Rio Rancho 6-8pm

March 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Notes:
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	March 17 St. Patrick's Day
							Mar 10 2 nd Tuesday afternoon support group
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Atrium Office ABQ 1-3pm 10701 Lomas NE
							Mar 18 3 rd Wednesday evening support group
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	Atrium Office ABQ 6-8pm 10701 Lomas NE
							Mar 25 Los Lunas evening support group
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	3445 Lambros Lp Los Lunas 6-8pm
							Mar 26 Last Thursday evening support group
29	30	31					800 Polaris Blvd Rio Rancho 6-8pm

*****ATTENTION: Support Groups Change of Venue in February ONLY***

In February only, support group meetings are going to go off site; we are going to go to McDonalds where the Resource Center will treat you to a free dessert and we will talk about what you'd like for your support group to do throughout 2015. These are your groups; we want them to meet your needs!

Locations: **McDonalds ABQ (Lomas and Juan Tabo)** **McDonalds Los Lunas (Main St)** **McDonalds Rio Rancho (in front of Walmart at Unser SE and Southern)**

ALSO....MANY, MANY THANKS!

To those of you who have supported the Resource Center this past year with a donation of money, time, services, United Way donations or referrals; we sincerely thank you for your generosity and confidence in us! Additionally, for those of you who have supported us with the Community Partners programs at Albertsons and/or Smiths; thanks for remembering to use your donation card because 1% of your purchase helps us in so many ways! If you'd like to learn more about these donation programs; just give us a call to get an Albertsons Community Partners Card or the easy process for using your existing Smith Rewards Card; you can make a difference for all of us one penny at a time!